



MATTERS OF OPINION



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Director

In June I attended the 50th anniversary of the Kulm High School class of 1955. It was a grand reunion with a wonderful program and banquet. The Kulm Alumni Association honors classes having 10-year anniversaries. It was amazing to see graduates from 1935 on up. Our class of '55 had 12 boys and 12 girls. Two classmates are deceased and a few could not attend.

It was a unique experience to return 50 years later and tour a school I attended for 12 years. Photos were taken and pictures of families were exchanged. We reminisced and renewed special bonds that seem to form more tightly from attending a small town North Dakota school. There was a certain amount of nostalgia, happiness, sadness and a special feeling that goes with seeing one another, for the most part, only every 10 years.

While driving back to Bismarck late at night, I had time to reflect on the events of the day. What it is that makes North Dakota and its people so special? I thought about it while passing through Linton, Wishek, Lehr and Fredonia, viewing the landscape that has changed dramatically with the addition of many inches of water in Emmons, Logan, LaMoure, Stutsman and Burleigh counties.

I saw lakes, ponds, sloughs and coulees filled with water. There were good number of ducks, pheasants, deer, and other wildlife. In the 50 years since graduation, it has gone from wet to dry wet to dry ... the cycle continues. There have been low game populations and high game populations. Farming practices have changed dramatically, leaving land more protected with better habitat and more trees. New farm programs have stressed less tillage and more conservation.

I remember well the old Soil Bank Program, and today's Conservation Reserve Program. Each has had a marked effect on the landscape and our game populations. I observed many upside down yellow triangles on the drive, signaling the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsman program is working. It puts money in the pockets of landowners, paid for by hunters and anglers, and opens the land (more than 750,000 acres and growing) to the public.

I not only thought of my 50th high school reunion, and all the things that have happened in the last half-century, but also of the Game and Fish Department's 75th anniversary. In the March issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, we reflected on the creation of the Department and what has happened in the last 75 years.

I've come to the conclusion that we don't think about the past often enough, only when anniversaries remind us to look back. It might serve us well to look ahead to the next anniversary, and make our mark today to positively influence the future's outcome.

What will things be like at my next 10-year high school reunion in 2015. Will the countryside be in the grips of a wet or dry cycle? Will we have plenty of game or a shortage? Will our farmers be prosperous or struggling to stay in business? Will we have more yellow triangles on the land or less?

The only thing I'm sure of, we'll all look 10 years older.